

# ENGAGING BYSTANDERS TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE



## Overview

*This document provides sexual violence advocates and preventionists an overview of the bystander intervention approach to sexual violence prevention. It provides key features of this type of intervention, information on the effectiveness and resources for more information.*

### Key features of engaging bystanders

A bystander, or witness, is someone who sees or hears a potentially harmful situation but might not know what to do, think others will act, or be afraid to do something.

A bystander approach helps community members identify specific roles that they can take to prevent sexual violence, including naming and stopping situations that could lead to sexual violence before it happens, stepping in during an incident, and speaking out against ideas and behaviors that support sexual violence. This model also supports individuals in building their skills to be effective and supportive allies to survivors<sup>1</sup> after an assault has taken place. Research shows that this technique is a promising way to help prevent the widespread problem of sexual violence across college campuses (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007; Cissner,

2009), high schools (Hawkins, 2005), and military installations (Hollingsworth, Ramey, & Hadley 2011; Potter & Moynihan, 2011). Some advantages of a bystander approach for primary prevention are that it engages all community members, discourages victim blaming, and shifts the focus from the victim and the perpetrator to the community as a whole (Tabachnick, 2009).

### Successful prevention programs that use bystander education

Everyone has a role in developing community knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. In-person bystander education prevention programs provide opportunities to build skills for helping directly or indirectly without placing bystanders' safety in jeopardy. Effective programs are theory- and research-based, and they provide time for role-playing and skill-building. Research shows that these are important ways to practice intervention techniques,

<sup>1</sup>Throughout this document, the terms "victim" and "survivor" are used interchangeably to be inclusive of the various ways people who have experienced sexual violence might identify.

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build confidence in bystanders, and widen the safety net for survivors (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2004, 2005). The number of programs using part or all of the bystander approach is growing, but only a few of them have been scientifically evaluated and found to be effective. These evidence-based programs are described briefly below:

- **Bringing in the Bystander®** ([www.unh.edu/preventioninnovations](http://www.unh.edu/preventioninnovations)) teaches college students safe ways to intervene before, during, and after an incident of sexual or relationship violence. There are two versions of the program; a single program or a multi-session program of single-sex groups led by a man-and-woman team. Experimental evaluation of both versions of the program found them to have long-term effectiveness regarding changes in knowledge, attitudes, and bystander behaviors. (Banyard et al., 2007; Moynihan, Banyard, Arnold, Eckstein, & Stapleton, 2010, 2011).

- **Green Dot** ([www.livethegreendot.com](http://www.livethegreendot.com)) is a program for college students that consists of two parts: 1) a motivational speech and 2) an interactive training, Students Educating and Empowering to Develop Safety (SEEDS), which teaches skills on how to be an engaged bystander. Cross-sectional evaluation suggests promising results for both, but especially for SEEDS, in observing performing bystander behaviors (Coker et al., 2011).

- **InterACT Sexual Assault Prevention Program** ([www.csulb.edu/colleges/cla/departments/communicationstudies/interact/](http://www.csulb.edu/colleges/cla/departments/communicationstudies/interact/)) is based on an interactive, skill-building performance geared toward college students, and uses dramatic techniques to teach effective ways of intervening. Participants are engaged in real life scenarios onstage to try out their own ideas on



how to be an engaged bystander. Evaluation showed it to be successful in changing attitudes; participants' self-reported likelihood of being an engaged bystander and the perception of being an engaged bystander increased (Ahrens, Rich, & Ullman, 2011).

- **Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)** ([www.jacksonkatz.com/mvp.html](http://www.jacksonkatz.com/mvp.html)) focuses on working with college and high school students, the military, and professional athletes in preventing gender violence. Evaluation of the program in a high school and a university setting suggests that the program is effective in changing attitudes; participants self-reported less sexist attitudes, and said they could intervene to prevent gender violence (Cissner, 2009; Ward, 2001).

- **MyStrength Club** ([www.MyStrength.org](http://www.MyStrength.org)) provides a multi-session club for high school boys, offering them a place where they can explore ways to prevent sexual violence. Preliminary evaluation of pilot-site testing in five California high schools showed promising results in positively changing attitudes and social climate (Kim & White, 2008).

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• **Scream (Students Challenging Realities and Educating about Myths) ([vpva.rutgers.edu/scream-theater-and-scream-athletes](http://vpva.rutgers.edu/scream-theater-and-scream-athletes))** uses a peer educational and interactive theater program to engage college students in the prevention of interpersonal violence. Evaluation of this program indicates its effectiveness regarding attitude change (McMahon, Postmus, Warrener, & Koenick, in press).

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## Social marketing campaign

In addition to in-person programs, another way to reach bystanders in target audiences is through a social marketing campaign. Here is an example of a social marketing campaign that has been evaluated:

• **Know Your Power® Bystander Social Marketing Campaign ([www.know-your-power.org](http://www.know-your-power.org))** is the social marketing campaign of the Bringing in the Bystander® program. It consists of posters, bookmarks, and bus wraps featuring scenes with bystanders intervening in situations – such as challenging sexist attitudes and stepping in to prevent sexual and domestic violence. Multiple evaluations indicate that the campaign is effective in changing awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior (Potter, 2012; Potter, Moynihan, & Stapleton, 2011; Potter, Moynihan, Stapleton, & Banyard, 2009).

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## What you can do

Bystander intervention approaches have been proven effective in many types of communities. Preventionists and advocates working toward preventing sexual violence can learn more about the bystander intervention approach and the effectiveness of such programs in *Bystander Intervention and Sexual Violence Prevention*:

*Research Brief* (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2013), or by viewing bystander intervention resources (<http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/bystander-intervention-resources>). To learn more about developing a bystander intervention program, see *Engaging Bystanders to Prevent Sexual Violence: An Advocate's Guide* (Benner, 2013) for strategies to support bystander work within an organization or contact the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. Advocates and preventionists can connect with other people doing prevention work and share success stories by signing up to PreventConnect's online group and email list at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/prevent-connect/>.

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For more information, contact the National Sexual Violence Resource Center at 877-739-3895 or visit <http://tinyurl.com/ofrw5v2>.

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